Clean Cities
Alternative Fuel Information Series

Clean Cities
Focus On Coalitions

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Voluntary Participation Drives Oklahoma's Coalitions

Ask Oklahoma's two Clean Cities coordinators what makes their coalitions tick, and you'll hear a number of common themes: Commitment. Vision. Leadership. Enthusiasm. Cooperation. Proactivity. The Oklahoma coalitions' accomplishments have been made possible, said Central Oklahoma Coordinator Yvonne Anderson, "by the tremendous vision, leadership, and cooperation shown by the local fuel providers and other coalition stakeholders, many of whom are pioneers in the alternative fuel industry. Our stakeholders are as committed to the cause as we are. Both coalitions are championed by stakeholders who believe wholeheartedly in the Clean Cities program—they truly have a vision for the future."

Tulsa Coordinator Lori Russell agreed. "Our stakeholders are sold on alternative fuels. They're enthusiastic about sharing their experiences to help alternative fuels and vehicles make further inroads into the state. They really believe that clean air matters and that we, as a nation, need to work toward independence from foreign oil."

Both coordinators cited many examples including Oklahoma Natural Gas (ONG), the local gas utility. ONG is a key player in both coalitions. Anderson commented, "ONG has been a tremendous friend to our coalitions."

Central Oklahoma Coordinator Yvonne Anderson accepts the keys to a Honda Civic GX, donated to the coalition by Oklahoma Natural Gas (ONG). From left: Zach Taylor, executive director of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments; Anderson; ONG customer service specialist Kent Jackson; and Edmund Farrell, a senior vice president of ONG's parent company, ONEOK.

Six years, 5,000 AFVs

Central Oklahoma received its Clean Cities designation May 29, 1996. Tulsa was designated on September 22, 1997. The Tulsa coalition now has about 60 stakeholders, and 67 stakeholders participate in the Central Oklahoma coalition. Both coalitions take a voluntary approach to AFV and infrastructure development, working with local stakeholders to integrate alternative fuels into the state. Currently (mid-year 2002), more than 5,000 alternative fuel vehicles can be found on Oklahoma's roadways.

According to *Natural Gas Fuels Magazine*, ONG is currently ranked first among the 100 largest gas utilities in North America with 92.5% of its 1,000-vehicle fleet running on compressed natural gas (CNG). By the end of 2002, ONG expects to be completely independent of foreign oil as a fleet fuel source. ONG is also active in developing the statewide fueling infrastructure and in marketing natural gas vehicles.

The Tulsa coalition is proud of Tulsa Public Schools, which Russell called an "alternative fuels trendsetter." The school district began its conversion to CNG in 1988, long before the Energy Policy Act of 1992 (EPAct) became law. It now operates about 200 alternative fuel vehicles (AFVs), mostly on CNG. Tulsa boasts three fueling stations that the school district leases from ONG. By using CNG instead of diesel, the district saves approximately $300–$500 per vehicle annually, an amount that goes a long way toward the costs of the lease.

A State of Many "Firsts"

When Central Oklahoma Clean Cities hosts its first National Clean Cities Conference, May 12–15, 2002, in Oklahoma City, it'll simply be the latest in the Oklahoma coalitions' long string of firsts.

In 1998, for example, the Mid-Del Electric Vehicle Center of Technology (EVCT) in Midwest City, Oklahoma, began the nation's first formal training course on electric vehicle

(EV) maintenance and repair. Within 18 months of its launch, the center distinguished itself by becoming the nation's first EV training program certified in Continuing Automotive Service Education (CASE). Administered by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, CASE certification ensures that the instructors and the curriculum meet or exceed established professional standards.

In a first for Tulsa, the city held its inaugural National AFV Day Odyssey on April 11, 2002. Sponsored by the National Alternative Fuels Training Consortium (NAFTC), the day was dedicated to education about alternative fuels. The Tulsa coalition, along with GM, Daimler-Chrysler, and DOE's Clean Cities Program, hosted a breakfast seminar for 80 people from all walks of life and all types of businesses.

Oklahoma also boasts one of the nation's first "Clean Airports." At Will Rogers World Airport in Oklahoma City, shuttle services operate CNG buses and vans, and the facilities fleet runs CNG pickup trucks. Southwest Airlines operates a completely electric gate. A new public-access CNG refueling facility was completed recently.

Finally, Central Oklahoma is home to the country's first "grass-to-gas" research and development project. A partnership of Williams Energy Services, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Oklahoma is exploring a process that converts low-cost buffalo or prairie grasses and grain residues into ethanol.

Recognition Comes Easily

The Tulsa coalition was ranked one of the "cleanest" of the Clean Cities in the nation in 2000. Using a rating system DOE developed to determine the success of each Clean City, Tulsa was ranked fifth out of about 80 coalitions around the country. Coalitions were awarded points for each AFV on the road and each refueling station in use, as well as activities including coalition meetings, media coverage, and public outreach events.

In 2001, the Central Oklahoma coalition received DOE's Madison Avenue Award for outstanding public outreach efforts after 14 articles ran in local and regional newspapers about the coalition and alternative fuel projects. The coalition also hosted AFV displays and gave out Clean Cities information at local events, including an EV display at the Mid-Del EVCT, TreeFest 2000, and the Oklahoma City and Tinker AFB Earth Day celebrations.

And in 2000, the FAA's Southwest Region awarded Will Rogers World Airport its Environmental Achievement Award. The award for going "above and beyond" the requirements of today's environmental regulations recognizes those who have truly embraced the concepts of protecting, conserving, and enhancing the environment. The FAA Southwest Region includes all commercial and general aviation airports in Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. Also in 2000, Tinker Air Force Base received a Best Practice Award from the U.S. Air Force for its robust alternative fuels program.

School District Superintendent Dr. Cheryl Steele cuts the ribbon on a new electric school bus at the Mid-Del Electric Vehicle Center of Technology. The center is the nation's first EV training provider certified in Continuing Automotive Service Education (CASE).

Local Legislators Walk the Talk

The future looks bright on the legislative front, too. Thanks to the state's proactive and visionary legislators, Oklahoma offers a 50% state income tax credit on the alternative fuel conversion cost or new OEM incremental cost for AFVs. The state offers a tax credit of 10% of the total value of the vehicle up to $1,500 on AFV resales if a credit has not been previously taken, and it provides a 50% tax credit on the cost of AFV fueling infrastructure (including compression equipment and storage tanks). These credits are in effect through January 1, 2009. Legislation also provides for licensing and operation of "neighborhood electric vehicles" on Oklahoma's streets and byways with speed limits of 35 mph or less.

Anderson summed up Oklahoma's pride in its coalitions. "We may not make a lot of noise in Oklahoma, but we have a lot to be proud of. Our stakeholders are quietly going about expanding one of the most viable and vibrant alternative fuels industry-based economies in the nation—on a proactive and voluntary basis."

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